

Prevent Bleeding When Taking Blood Thinners

Blood thinners are medicines used to keep harmful blood clots from forming in the body. Blood thinners can also prevent existing blood clots from getting bigger. These medicines do not really “thin” the blood, but make it harder for a blood clot to form.

The two most common types of blood thinners are:

- **Anticoagulants:** These medicines increase the time it takes for blood to clot and makes it harder for a blood clot to form. These medicines include:
 - ▶ Warfarin (Coumadin or Jantoven)
 - ▶ Heparin
 - ▶ Dabigatran (Pradaxa)
 - ▶ Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)
 - ▶ Fondaparinux (Arixtra)
 - ▶ Enoxaparin (Lovenox)
 - ▶ Dalteparin (Fragmin)
- **Antiplatelets:** These medicines prevent the platelets in the blood from sticking together and forming a blood clot. These medicines include:
 - ▶ Aspirin
 - ▶ Clopidogrel (Plavix)
 - ▶ Ticagrelor (Brilinta)
 - ▶ Ticlopidine (Ticlid)

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Important Things to Remember:

- When taking blood thinners, you have a higher risk for bleeding. It is important to always follow safety precautions.
- Blood thinners work best when they are taken the right way. Take your medicine as directed and get the blood tests that have been ordered by your doctor.
- Tell your doctors, pharmacist, dentist and any of your health care providers that you are taking blood thinners. Keep an up-to-date list of all your medicines with you. Make sure to include the dose, amount and how often you take the medicine.
- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you take any new medicine to make sure they are safe for you to take with your blood thinner. This includes any vitamins or herbal supplements, prescription and over the counter medicines. Do not take any new medicines that may contain aspirin, such as pain relievers, cold or stomach medicines.
- **If you are going to have a test, procedure or surgery**, you may be told to hold or stop taking your blood thinner and then restart it later. Talk with the doctor who prescribed your blood thinner and the doctor who ordered your test, procedure or surgery about how to take your blood thinner.
- **If you have a stent, do not stop taking your medicines to prevent clots without first talking to the doctor who put in the stent.** For more information, ask for the patient education handout [Protect Your Stent](#).

Food and Blood Thinners

- The foods you eat can affect how some blood thinners work in your body. It is important to follow food guidelines while taking blood thinners. Talk to your doctor or dietitian if you have any questions.
- When taking **warfarin (Coumadin)**, you will need to watch the amount of **vitamin K** rich foods you eat. Keep the amount of vitamin K in your diet the same from week to week. Foods high in vitamin K include: green leafy vegetables, spinach broccoli, cabbage, greens (collard, turnip, beet, mustard and dandelion greens) kale, and brussel sprouts. For a more complete list, ask your doctor or dietitian. For more information, ask for the patient education handout [Diet and Warfarin \(Coumadin\)](#).

- Check with your doctor or dietitian before taking any dietary supplements like Ensure or BOOST. Some contain high amounts of vitamin K.
- Check with your doctor before taking any vitamin supplements. Larger amounts of vitamin K or vitamins A, C and E, may change how your blood thinning medicine works.
- **Do not** drink alcoholic beverages while taking blood thinners.

General Tips to Prevent Bleeding:

- **Prevent Falls and Other Injuries**
 - ▶ Make your home a safe environment. Ask for the handout [Safety Tips to Prevent Falls at Home.](#)
 - ▶ Ask for help with walking.
 - ▶ Bending over with your head lower than your shoulders may cause you to get dizzy and fall. Bend your knees and keep your head up when picking something up off the floor.
 - ▶ Do not play sports or do other activities where you could get hurt, such as football, hockey or skiing.
 - ▶ Wear protective gear during non-contact sports, such as bike helmets, elbow and knee pads.
- **Protect Your Skin**
 - ▶ Use an electric razor for shaving.
 - ▶ Wear gloves when using sharp tools such as knives or scissors and when working with plants or yard tools.
 - ▶ Do not go barefoot. Wear shoes or non-skid slippers to protect your feet. Wear supportive shoes when walking. Do not wear open toed shoes or flip-flops.
 - ▶ Carefully trim toe and finger nails.
 - ▶ Check your skin for any sores or open cuts that could bleed.
 - ▶ Do not cut corns or calluses on your feet or hands. Talk to your doctor if you have these problems.
 - ▶ Do not wear tight fitting clothing or elastic anywhere on your body. This includes tight socks, undergarments or pantyhose.

- **Avoid Constipation**
 - ▶ Drink 6 to 8 cups of water each day and eat a healthy diet.
 - ▶ Do not strain when having a bowel movement. Ask your doctor about a stool softener or a laxative that is safe to use.
 - ▶ Do not use enemas, suppositories and any harsh laxatives that could cause rectal bleeding.
 - ▶ Exercise can help with constipation.

- **Keep Your Mouth Healthy**
 - ▶ Use a soft toothbrush or WaterPik. Do not use harsh or abrasive toothpaste. Use waxed dental floss carefully. Do not use toothpicks.
 - ▶ Check your mouth each day for bleeding or sores.
 - ▶ If you wear dentures or a retainer, remove these for at least 8 hours a day to give your mouth a rest. Do not wear poorly fitted dentures or retainers.
 - ▶ Talk to your doctor and your dentist about your medicines before having any dental work done.

- **Prevent and Treat Nose Bleeds**
 - ▶ Use a humidifier to add moisture in the air, especially if you have the heat on in your home.
 - ▶ Do not blow your nose hard or with force.
 - ▶ Watch for nosebleeds, especially after sneezing. If you have a nosebleed:
 - Apply pressure and ice to your nose and the back of your neck.
 - Sit with your head and body leaning forward. Do not lie down or put your head back.
 - If the bleeding lasts more than 30 minutes get medical care.

When to Get Medical Care

You should get medical care right away if you have any of the following:

- Bleeding that does not stop or is very heavy
- A serious fall or injury to your head
- Severe headache, confusion, weakness or numbness
- Coughing up blood
- Blood in vomit, vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Menstrual bleeding or a period that is much heavier or lasts much longer than normal
- Red or dark brown colored urine
- Bowel movements that are red or black like tar
- Frequent nosebleeds
- Heavy bleeding from the gums
- Unusual bruising, swelling or discomfort
- Severe stomach ache